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ASSOCIATION OF DOCUMENTATION, INFORMATION AND LIBRARY SCIENTISTS IN AFRICA

Association of Documentation, Information and Library Scientists in Africa

1. Introduction

Associations from time immemorial are used primarily for taking care of the interests of their members. These bind people together, and facilitate collective actions on the part of their members.

In Africa today, various groups of people have come together to form associations primarily for the welfare of their members. However, in so far as associations for documentalists, Information and Library Scientists are concerned, very little activity has taken place. Librarians all over Africa have formed subregional associations, like the "Standing Conference of the Eastern, Central and Southern African Librarians, which meets at specific scheduled periods to discuss matters of common interests. However, such subregional associations of Librarians have not been very effective because of their loosely drawn up constitutions, and the status of Librarianship as a profession in many African countries.

Documentation and Information sciences are just developing in Africa and given the interest that librarians and decision makers in Africa are beginning to show in these two new disciplines one sees a chance for an association of Documentation, information and Library scientists making a contribution to the development of this professions and Africa in general.

1.1 A need for an Association of Documentation Information and Library Scientists in Africa

One of the major constraints which affects the flow of information in Africa, is the lack of qualified information professionals. On the other hand, it appears that there has been a long-run tendency to ignore the need for educational programmes for Librarians, Documentations and Information Scientists. On the other hand, the problem appears to have been complicated by the new technologies and the key role which they play in modern information services. These advanced information technologies, especially in their present form, have been less than user friendly and the information professional thus tend to become an important source of knowledge in the user's information search.

As the importance of information sources for development purposes are becoming generally recognized in society, the need for user education will expand accordingly. Moreover the already mentioned introduction of information technologies also tend to raise the requirements for user education. This vital aspect of the promotion of information flow appears to be largely ignored in Africa, and this hampers the effective information flow.

To alleviate the problems of effective information flow in Africa, and to sensitize the policy and decision makers on the importance of information in national development an association of documentation, information and library scientists is necessary in Africa.

1.2 PROPOSED FUNCTIONS OF AN ASSOCITION OF DOCUMENTATION INFORMATION AND LIBRARY SCIENTISTS IN AFRICA

(a) Creating an awareness of the importance of information for development

One of the major constraints to effective information flow in Africa is the low priority given to information and documentation programmes on the part of decision and policy makers. Once formed, such association will be required to use its organs to create an awareness of the importance of information in development.

(b) Creation of motivation to use available information

A key constraint to an effective information flow in Africa is lack of motivation to use available information. Such lack of motivation may arise from inadequate awareness of the sources, but it may equally often arise from the cumbersome way in which information services may function.

The absence of motivation to use available information may also emerge a result of a concommitant lack of economic incentives. For instance when no economic incentives exist to implement the information available in technical standards regarding quality levels (i.e. products of sub-standard quality level can be sold), this information will naturally not be utilized. The proposed association should take the reponsibility of motivating people in Africa to use available information for planning and decision making. Such motivation should take a form of public campaigns.

(c) To assist in the advancement of Information Sciences, Documentation and Librarianship as useful professions

The above disciplines are given very low status by governments in Africa as professions, partly because of the ignorance of the services that these professions can offer and partly because of the lack of training facilities. It will therefore be encumbent upon the association being proposed to advance the above professions in Africa, by carrying out popularization work, e.g. through demonstrations by the organization e.g. shows, and public meetings in various parts of Africa. Such activities by the association could help advance the importance of these professions and thus improve their status rating in Africa.

(d) Assist indigenous Information Systems like PADIS to reach National level

Various information systems are being created in Africa, and of mention is the Pan African Documentation and Information System (PADIS). PADIS has been created by the ECA to facilitate development information exchange among ECA member States. An association like the one being proposed will therefore ensure that the concepts and methodologies of PADIS reach the national level, so that all African countries can be able to participate in PADIS. Such an association will also ensure harmonization of information systems in Africa.

(e) Ensuring Standardization and Compatibility

In order that as many countries as possible can participate in any information system, like PADIS, standards, and compabilities must be kept. The proposed association will be able to provide the forum, for discussing such issues, and drawing up standards to ensure compatibility.

(f) Improving and maintaining the quality of documentation, Information and Library Personnel

The above disciplines are relatively new, and many African countries do not have the schemes of service of such personnel. The proposed association will be able to draw up schemes of service for such personnel, and monitor the development of this profession, so that the quality of these personnel is maintained.

(g) Encouraging the establishment of National Associations

Many African countries do not have national associations of documentation information and library personnel. It will therefore be the responsibility of the proposed association to encourage member States to create national associations. The establishment of national associations will enable the integration of information services at national level. It will also assist in establishing a regular dialogue between the generators of information and user institutions and individuals in individual countries. National associations therefore can assist in implementing decisions taken by the proposed regional association.

1.3 Headquarters

The headquarters of such an association shall be provisionally located at the Pan African Documentation and Information System (PADIS), in the Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa.

1.4 Membership

The association shall be composed of ordinary, honorary and institutional members.

(a) Ordinary Members

Professional, information, documentation or library personnel, African and non-African who work or have worked as information documentation or library personnel in Africa may be admitted as ordinary members.

(b) Honorary members

Persons of outstanding distinction in the field of information, documentation and library sciences who have rendered valuable services to Africa, may be admitted as honorary members.

(c) Institutional members

Institutions such as national library and documentation centres, and international associations such as Federation of International Documentation (FID), and International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) and agencies operating in Africa, African Banks, African national Institutes and academies of Science will be eligible as institutional members.

Other details on the operation of such an association to be worked out once formed.